



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Written Testimony Presented Before  
the Senate Committee on Health  
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by

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and

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### **SB 233 RELATING TO TOBACCO PRODUCTS**

Chair Green, Vice Chair Nishihara, and Members of the Committee:

Mahalo for the opportunity to share our support for the significance of increasing the state excise tax on tobacco products.

The University of Hawaii Cancer Center is recognized as one of only 65 National Cancer Institute (NCI) designated Cancer Centers in the country. The Center studies cancer in relation to the unique physical, cultural, and environmental characteristics of Hawaii. Our mission is to reduce the burden of cancer and ensure a healthier future for the people of our state. We are a research enterprise affiliated with the University of Hawaii at Mānoa.

The UH Cancer Center is a recipient of significant funding generated through cigarette tax legislation passed in 2006. This funding enabled the Center to begin construction in October on a state-of-the-art cancer center that will greatly enhance and expand our research capacity. Two of our faculty members are among the nation's leading experts in tobacco use and cessation: Thomas Wills, PhD., interim director of the Prevention and Control program and his colleague, Thaddeus Herzog, PhD.

The perils of smoking tobacco have long been known. Smoking is one of the most preventable causes of death in our society. But national research also tells us there is no safe form of tobacco use. At least 28 chemicals in smokeless tobacco have been found to cause oral, esophageal, and pancreatic cancer. Smokeless tobacco has also been linked to increased rates of heart disease, gum disease and oral lesions. All tobacco products contain nicotine which is addictive.

Unfortunately the direct marketing of tobacco products to our children and young adults is having a negative impact in Hawaii as the use rates for smokeless tobacco products

is trending upwards, indicated by the increase in tax revenues on these products. Data tell us that the younger the age at which tobacco use habits are formed, the more likely the user is to face serious health consequences as they age.

Raising tobacco-tax rates will reduce youth use. After reviewing a number of research studies on the relationship between tobacco product prices and use rates, the independent U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Task Force on Community Preventive Services similarly concluded that increases in tobacco prices decrease both adult and youth prevalence and reduce the quantity used by adolescents and young adults who do not quit. The Task Force also concluded that adolescents and young adults are two to three times more sensitive to tobacco price changes than adults. Accordingly, the Task Force strongly recommends excise tax increases to raise the unit prices of tobacco products in order to: 1) reduce consumption of tobacco products; 2) reduce tobacco-use initiation; and 3) increase tobacco-use cessation.

Those users hardest hit by an increased tax on tobacco products will be youth. Therefore, the opportunity to discourage youth and adults from using tobacco products by increasing the tax on these products is an initiative we strongly support.

Mahalo for your partnership in improving the health and well being of the people of Hawai'i.